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SIPDIS

FOR A/S FRAZER AND DAS YAMAMOTO FROM VICKI HUDDLESTON

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [MARR](#) [ET](#) [ER](#) [UNSC](#) [EE](#) [BORDER](#)

SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: MELES SAYS UNSC DRAFT RESOLUTION ON  
BORDER JEOPARDIZES PEACE

Classified By: Charge d'Affairs Vicki Huddleston for reason 1.4 (b,d)

1. (C) Summary: Prime Minister Meles contended that the drafted UNSC resolution on the Ethiopia/Eritrea border would jeopardize any chance of a peaceful settlement. Isaias would be emboldened -- and "rewarded for his "blackmail" -- by getting a Security Council endorsement of demarcation of the border without dialogue. According to the PM, the national security of Ethiopia is more important than the views of the UNSC. Demarcation without dialogue would lead to backlash, he said, weakening Ethiopia and strengthening Eritrea. Therefore under no circumstance can Ethiopia accept such a UNSC resolution. Meles asked if the US position, which he said had supported implementation of demarcation accompanied by dialogue, had changed. I assured him that the US was pressing hard to delay the resolution or modify it so that neither side would be forced into a corner, and that we were hopeful that the US/UN envoy would be announced soon. Reported troop movements by both countries toward the border and the internal unrest in Addis could cause a deterioration of the border situation and a miscalculation by one of the parties. British Ambassador who just met with Meles reports that the PM say Ethiopian commanders in the military zone do not view the situation with undue alarm, but have reinforced and redeployed as a precaution against a misjudgement from Isaias resulting from internal strife here and the UN draft resolution. End Summary.

2. (C) Earlier in the week, the Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister both expressed their extreme concerns about the draft resolution, specifically Operative paragraphs 9 and 10. I told them both that the USG was doing its best to delay, cancel, or modify the resolution so that it would not close doors or limit the options of the US/UN envoy. On November 2, in the midst of street violence (septel), the Prime Minister called me in to again reiterate his concern that the USG was pressing for operative paragraph(s) that would demand the immediate demarcation of the border. I again reassured him that this was not the case. He said that DAS Yamamoto had told him that the US position was to implement demarcation with dialogue, and that it was his impression from his conversations with high level USG officials at the annual UNGA that this was their position as well. I spoke with DAS Yamamoto after the meet to confirm our position and again passed on to the PM that it had not changed. I also pointed out that we were going to move quickly on the envoy as we are increasingly concerned about reports that both sides are moving troops and tanks closer to the border.

3. (C) Meles said that a resolution calling for implementation of demarcation without preconditions could allow Isaias to tell the UN that since it had now endorsed his position, it was up to the UNSC ensure that demarcation was carried out, so no envoy would be needed. Even if Isaias agreed to the envoy, the proposed resolution would still reward his "blackmail" of the UN. If Isaias accepted the envoy but insisted that, as per the resolution, the demarcation should begin immediately, the situation would still deteriorate. Ethiopia would refuse because its very security was at stake, and this would return the situation to square one. The UNSC's views were of less importance to Ethiopia than its national security, Meles warned. Ethiopia was willing to listen to its friends and to involved itself in give and take, but it was not appropriate to ask Ethiopia to "break". "There is no reason to bend if demarcation means fighting Eritrea with all the chips on their side and having exposed ourselves to political backlash domestically -- that would be breaking. Telling Eritrea to go to Hell would give us a better fighting chance. We would rather fight before making concessions that militarily debilitate us," Meles argued. "To agree to demarcation (without dialogue) would be like shooting ourselves in the head. Ethiopia must have dialogue on all (relevant) issues, including the border, if a solution is to be found."

4. (C) It is not UNMEE that keeps Eritrea from war, Meles claimed, but the fact that Isaias does not have the capability to defeat Ethiopia. "He doesn't want to die," the PM added. But for Ethiopia to accept demarcation without dialogue would be pointless, as it would destroy any chance of peace. "It won't happen." Meles said that the Boundary Commission is a bilateral agreement between Eritrea and

Ethiopia. The Security Council was not/not asked to guarantee demarcation, but rather was only asked to guarantee the cease fire. Meles doubted that the Security Council had a legal basis for enforcing demarcation.

15. (C) Meles summed up by saying that the draft resolution would give Isaias more ammunition for another war because the UNSC would have endorsed demarcation without dialogue. Ethiopia's position on this point was laid out in the GOE's five-point plan, he reiterated. "What must be done is to prove to Isaias that other options are closed. Ethiopia would like to have peace so we have refrained from responding or provoking Isaias. If Isaias wants to attack, he will, but if he decides he can't win then he will engage in give and take," Meles said. A resolution that includes operative paragraph 10 on demarcation is worse for Ethiopia than losing UNMEE, because Ethiopia has managed the border in the past without UNMEE. "But with this resolution, prospects for peace are seriously jeopardized."

16. (C) Comment: Meles will not accept demarcation without dialogue because he will lose critical support from both EPRDF party members and significant portions of the population. Although I made it clear that we had not support OP10 of the current proposed resolution, the Ethiopian mission in New York is reporting corridor conversation that lead Meles to believe that the USG supports including OP10 as a way of placating Isaias and improving the chances that he will accept the US envoy. Meles is fond of talking about the "red line" -- the position Ethiopia will not go beyond. This is clearly a red line issue. From my view point, including language in the resolution that calls for demarcation without some reference to dialogue would reduce the US/UN envoy's flexibility and chances of success. Given the build-up on the front, I urge the naming of our envoy as soon as possible and continued efforts to delay the UNSC resolution, or ensure that it does not do more harm than good.

HUDDLESTON